

## **Familiarities** by **islaydragons**

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**Summary:** He knew that face well. The defiant yet fearful look that you gave to someone who obviously held more power over you. He knew it well because he had the same one.

## 1. Chapter 1

Billy Hargrove was somebody that Sarah Aston actively avoided.

She definitely found him attractive (who wouldn't?) and, in any other lifetime, would fall for his devilish smirks and smoldering eyes, but not this one. Sarah wanted to avoid anyone that could change someone's inhibitions from a single look.

But, despite all of Sarah's hard work, she couldn't escape the boy that treated everyone like they were beneath him.

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The young girl couldn't have been any older than fourteen, but she waiting for someone, and by the looks of it, they were late. Sarah could've easily left her where she was and continued on her way, but something about the impatient and angry look on the girl's face causes Sarah to approach the redhead.

"Excuse me?" Sarah said in greeting, causing the young girl to startle and stare back with wide eyes. "Do you need a ride home? It's starting to get dark, and I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving you out here."

The girl squinted at her distrustfully. "I don't know you."

Sarah cracked a smile at her. "True," she conceded before holding a hand out. "I'm Sarah. And you?"

The younger girl continued to stare at her but shook her hand all the same. "Max."

"So, Max," Sarah continued. "Would you like a ride home? I really don't mind. You look like you've been waiting awhile."

The girl, now dubbed as Max, shuffled her feet and pursed her lips. She adjusted her bag on her shoulder and contemplated the thought some more. Sarah waited patiently for her answer.

"I guess," Max drawled out slowly, blowing some of her red hair out of her face. "My brother probably forgot that he was supposed to pick

me up."

Sarah smiled brightly at the young girl and beckoned for her to follow. "Don't most brothers? Mine would do the same thing. I always had to walk home."

Out of the corner of her eye, Sarah could see Max starting to relax little by little. She didn't blame her being suspicious - Sarah *was* a stranger and had no obligation to take the girl home, and with all of the drama that Hawkins had, Sarah wasn't even a little offended from Max's reaction towards her offer.

As the two girls approached Sarah's vehicle, she smiled sheepishly at the young teen. "It's that not great of a car, and it definitely needs a lot of help, but it'll get us to where we need to go."

Max shook her head and opened the door to get in. "No, it's great. Thanks for giving me the ride, Sarah."

The seventeen year old waved off her thanks and followed her directions to her home. The sky had darkened almost completely, and Sarah could see Max beginning to fidget in her seat uncomfortably. "What's wrong?"

Max stopped abruptly and shook her head, a nervous smile on her face. "Nothing. Just... my brother's home, and I'm not sure how he'll react."

Sarah frowned at the flighty look in Max's eyes before sighing. Max stared at her as she turned her car off and began to get out of the car. Sarah gave her a questioning stare. "Well? I'll talk to him for you - your parents, too, so you don't get into trouble."

Max scrambled out of the worn down Toyota and waved her hands frantically. "No!" she tried to ease. "I-It's fine! You really don't need to say anything."

Just by those words and Max's reaction, Sarah had a feeling *exactly* why she was worried. The older teen pursed her lips and gave Max a firm nod. "Don't worry."

Max still seemed uncomfortable with the whole ordeal, but quickly

realized that her words weren't reaching Sarah. Sarah stared at her and waited for the young girl to lead the way into her home. Max opened and closed her mouth a few more times before dejectedly sighing and trudging towards the door. Clenching and unclenching her fists a few times to calm down, Sarah followed dutifully, thinking of the best way to avoid Max getting in trouble - even though it was her brother's fault for leaving her alone.

"I'm home," Max called out, slowly stepping through the doorway. Sarah looked around the house in quiet speculation as a man, presumably Max's father, stepped into sight with someone that was all too familiar to Sarah following behind with a scowl on his face. She had to blink a few times to make sure it was actually *Billy Hargrove* in front her as she glanced between him and Max.

"Oh, Max, I'm so glad you're home," Mr. Hargrove said, casting a glance to Billy. "We were worried when Billy came home without you after telling him that he would be picking you up from school. I was about to have a talk with him but I wanted to make sure I have all of the facts."

"Well-"

"Actually, Mr. Hargrove," Sarah butt in, causing the two men in front of her to finally notice her presence. "Sorry to intrude. I'm Sarah Aston," she thrust her hand out to shake and sent him a charming smile. "I wanted to apologize in person. It's my fault that Billy wasn't able to take Max home. I was helping her with some math homework after school, and we lost track of time, so I told him that I would take her home. I'm terribly sorry for the inconvenience. Please don't be upset with either of them."

Behind her, Sarah could feel Max gaping at her in astonishment and wonder, and from the corner of her eye, she could see Billy shooting her a suspicious look, but she maintained eye contact with the man in front her.

Mr. Hargrove recovered from the surprise he must've been feeling and shook her outstretched hand slowly. "Oh, well thank you for doing that, but you really didn't need to. Billy is more than capable of waiting for his stepsister."

Sarah could see Billy clenching his jaw at the word 'sister,' and she could hear Max shift uncomfortably as well, indicating this was a topic that had caused problems within the family before.

Sarah waved off his thanks much like she did to Max earlier. "It's not a problem, Mr. Hargrove. I'd be happy to take her home if the need be. I have an older brother, and he sometimes made plans to do something instead of picking me up, so I understand what's going on."

Mr. Hargrove blinked at her again before laughing heartily, causing Billy to stare at his father in disbelief. Max walked forward and was sharing the same look as her stepbrother.

Sarah decided that it was probably time she head home if she were to avoid her own mother's interrogation. "I just wanted to clear things up and apologize for the time I got Max home. I really must be going. My mother will start to get worried."

"It's no big deal, Sarah. Thank you again. Billy will walk you out," Mr. Hargrove offered - ordered, really - for his son, and Sarah's mood soured slightly.

She couldn't say that she knew Billy Hargrove well. The two have never spoken to each other, and she can't remember a time when their paths actually crossed. He was in a class or two with her, but that was it. She knew of his reputation and his image he tried very hard to maintain. She also knew that he knew he was very good-looking.

For a second, Billy looked ready to protest, but one look from his father stopped whatever argument that was ready to spew out. He grumbled and led her towards the door. Sarah waved a goodbye to Max, who still looked amazed from the entire interaction, and followed the boy. As soon as the door closed behind them, Billy rounded on her.

"What the hell was that?" he seethed. "I've never met you a day in my life, and I'm sure as hell that Max hasn't either."

Sarah returned his glare. "It was me saving both of your asses from getting into trouble. It was obvious as soon as I walked in that there

was going to be an argument."

Billy searched her face for any sign of deceit, but she remained steadfast. She would be lying if she said that he didn't intimidate her. He was taller than her, stronger than her, and right now, angrier than her. Her only relief was that there was no way he would cause an altercation right outside of his front door.

"I meant it when I said I wouldn't mind taking Max home if you couldn't."

Billy scoffed, so unlike his persona at school that Sarah was almost unsure how to react. "Stay away from her. Don't come back here, either."

Sarah knew a dismissal when it was there, and she rolled her eyes, holding her hands up as she started to back away towards her car. "Sorry, I didn't know it was a crime to help someone out. I'll keep that in mind next time."

With those words, Sarah got into her beat up car and sped out of the driveway, not regretting any of her decisions she made that night because she definitely recognized what was going on.

## 2. Chapter 2

Billy Hargrove was confused. Not the normal 'I don't know how to do this' type of confused, but the 'What the hell happened' type. It wasn't everyday that a random girl showed up at *his* house and prevented his father from doing something, especially a girl that had no business being there.

After the situation from the night before, Billy found it surprisingly easy to find Sarah. She wasn't someone that stuck out to him for her looks particularly, but he would be an idiot if he couldn't recognize the girl who talked down his father.

She was putting her things in her locker when he strutted over and leaved against the lockers.

"So are you going to explain what all of that was about last night?"

Instead of facing him, she continued to put her things away. "I don't know what you mean."

He growled, "Who do you think you are, huh? Trying to get something, is it? Or-"

He was cut off by her slamming her locker shut, and immediately, his anger dissipated slightly at the sight of her.

Sarah was sporting a split lip with some blood still coated around it. There was a dark bruise beginning to form on her cheekbone with smaller ones around her chin from someone gripping it too tightly. Her green eyes looked at him angrily, whether it was from his obvious gawking at her appearance or from their earlier conversation, he wasn't sure.

"You look like shit," he blurted out, causing the girl to roll her eyes.

"Hi, I'm Sarah and we haven't been properly introduced," she replied sarcastically. "And thank you for the obvious observation. If you'll excuse me," she shoved past him. "I need to get to class."

Billy opened his mouth again, his anger incited again, but Sarah

rushed away, and he lost her in the crowd.

"Damn it."

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The next time Billy saw her was in one of his classes. He never noticed her before, but now, she was the person he noticed the most. Instead of sitting in his usual seat, he glared at the boy that was sitting in the desk next to hers, causing him to vacate his desk in a frenzy. Billy plopped down and stared at Sarah.

"I'm getting really tired of this dancing around shit," he muttered darkly to her, eyes flashing in irritation. "Mind your business, and we won't be having any issues."

Unfazed, Sarah glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. "Are you taking Max home today or should I? Your dad seemed in a much better mood after I spoke with him last night."

Billy really didn't know whether to commend her for her attitude or strangle her for her indifference. She had no obligation to 'help' him or however she saw it as. She wasn't his friend, not even his acquaintance. The two had never interacted before, which is a hard feat with his rising reputation.

He was about to threaten her again, but their teacher shushed the class, and Sarah made it obvious she wouldn't be hearing anything else from him.

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Billy didn't see her again the rest of the day. He wasn't sure if that was for the best or if he was more irritated for not getting his point across.

Just to make sure she didn't get any satisfaction, Billy made sure he picked up Max on time today. He didn't want to risk another appearance from Sarah at his own home.

Max sat in the car and must've caught onto his rotten mood because she remained silent. He glanced at her.

"Do you know that girl? The one that took you home yesterday."



Immediately, Max shook her head. "I've never seen her until then. She just asked if I needed a ride home and was really pushy about it, so I said yes."

Billy snorted derisively. "You really think she's just *nice* then? People don't just do things out of the kindness of their hearts, you know. Don't talk to her anymore."

Max glared back at him, and he raised a challenging eyebrow at her. Despite her threatening him during the supernatural fiasco, he was still aggressive and controlling towards her, but he at the same time, he didn't treat her as bad. Perhaps it was the fact that she actually stood up for herself in a commanding fashion that he appreciated (only a little, of course), or he was just tired of her not listening.

"She is nice," Max insisted. "Apparently, she helps tutor some kids at school, and that's why she was there yesterday. A-and she offered to talk to your dad!"

Billy slammed his hands on the steering wheel, causing Max to jump. He took a deep breath to calm himself a little. "I'm not going to repeat myself, Max."

Billy didn't trust Sarah. He didn't trust anybody, really, but he just *knew* that was an ulterior motive behind her actions. He wasn't lying to Max when he said that people weren't just nice to be nice. He had never met anyone that didn't want something from him, whether it was money or sex or even the popularity. He didn't care how much she thought she did for him. She wasn't to be trusted.

Max didn't reply, just scowled and turned to look out the window.

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Sarah never really cared about what she looked like to other people. It wasn't the least of her concerns. She couldn't afford makeup to cover any blemishes, and she wasn't offended when people would stare. She knew exactly what she looked like to other people.

Sarah was at the middle school, like she was everyday, to tutor a few kids in math. She was above average in the subject, and it also earned her a little bit of money, and the kids weren't too bad.

Except for maybe one.

"Dustin," Sarah exhaled, exasperated. "You really don't need my help. You're very smart, so I don't know why you pretend you need tutoring."

Dustin shook his head emphatically. "No, no. I really do. I-I suck at math! Like I don't get why this equals six!"

"Three plus three equals six."

"You learn something new everyday. You're the best, Sarah," he complimented, and she groaned, "Don't get me wrong, Dustin - you're a great kid, but I'm still confused."

"Well that makes two of us. I'm confused with math."

Sarah buried her head in her hands.

Dustin Henderson was a menace in the best way possible. She liked the kid, she really did, but he insisted of sitting with her for thirty minutes a day pretending to need help with his work instead of spending time with his friends, and she wasn't sure why.

She looked up to see him grinning at her, and even she couldn't help but smile back. "I *guess* I could help you a little bit longer."

Dustin's face lit up even more than it was, and he started spouting off about what he and his friends had gotten up to until a familiar name caught her attention.

"Did you say Max?"

He nodded, confused, and she continued, "Girl your age? Red hair? Got a pretty mean glare?"

"Yes," he answered slowly, squinting his eyes at her. "How did you know?"

"I took her home yesterday. I didn't know you knew her. I always thought Max was a guy when you talked about your friends."

"You've met her?!" he asked, more excited now. "That's great! That means you could totally hang out with us and meet the rest of the party. It won't be awkward now, right?"

Sarah patted his shoulder roughly to push him back into his seat before an administrator chastised them. "I wouldn't necessarily say that, Dustin. Besides, you could always invite them over when I come to watch you. Which, by the way, I still don't get why because you leave anyway, and I just sit around making sure no one breaks in."

He smiled sheepishly at her. "You get paid to just sit around. Isn't that every teenager's dream?"

Sarah smiled fondly at the boy and ruffled his hair. "Maybe you're just trying to keep me to yourself, huh? That's it, isn't it."

Spluttering with red cheeks, Dustin shook his head rapidly. "Of course not! Why would you even think that?"

Sarah laughed heartily at his expression. Dustin was very much like a little brother to her. She had 'babysat' him a few times before realizing that she was actually at his school everyday and decided to grace her with his presence even more. She likes to think it's because she's the laziest babysitter he's ever had.

Sarah checked the clock and started gathering Dustin's materials. "Looks like you need to head home soon or your mom will get worried and start calling mine. I want to say I won't see you tomorrow, but I have a feeling it's a futile attempt."

Dustin smirked at her and nodded. "You have a great feeling about that. I'll see you tomorrow, Sarah!"

Dustin wrapped her up in a quick hug before skipping out of the library, and Sarah smiled after him.

She was well aware of his avoidance of commenting on her appearance.

### 3. Chapter 3

Sarah didn't particularly enjoy the newfound attention that Billy was giving her. Perhaps it was unfair of her to not outright explain her intentions, but at the same time, she knew that he wouldn't like her answer either way.

He had taken it upon himself to glare at her anytime she came within his vision, and if she were honest, Billy Hargrove had a *nasty* glare. It was one of the many things she didn't particularly enjoy about him. She also didn't enjoy his questioning on her appearance, or his attacks on her shitty car.

"What do you want me to say?" she finally hissed at him, slamming her locker shut, feeling a vague sense of *deja vu*. "What if I was just being nice, huh?"

Billy scowled at her (a normal thing for her now), and hit his palm on the locker to mimic her own frustration. "You and I both know damn well that isn't true. I'm not an idiot."

"Could've fooled me."

Incited, Billy gripped her upper arm tightly, squeezing, and Sarah was sure there would be a hand print. She clenched her fists to prevent herself from retaliating with her own form of violence and watched his face closely before muttering darkly, "You really wanna know, Hargrove? I did it so your dad wouldn't beat your ass again. It seems like you get enough of that."

His eyes widened, legitimately surprised by her words. She guessed it was due to the fact that people didn't know that little fact about his life, and she found herself feeling a sense of sick satisfaction by being the one that figured it out. Billy's grip on her loosened and she pulled herself out of his grip.

"Keep your hands off me," she seethed as she stormed past him, not catching the slight flicker of realization upon his face.

Sarah wouldn't consider herself hard to get along with. At least not

initially. She knew how to manipulate adults in order to get in their good graces because it was something she needed to do. Would she consider it wrong? Not really. Sometimes, there were situations that called for it.

The night she spoke with Mr. Hargrove called for it.

Sarah knew something was up as soon as she saw Max's reaction when they approached the Hargrove residence. The fidgeting, the worry, and the slight amount of fear tipped her over. And once she stepped into the house, she noticed the stiff posture of Billy as he stayed a slight distance away from his father. She noticed he would keep his head angled away from his father's face to avoid looking him in the eye - to avoid challenging him. Sarah was by no means a genius, but she was definitely not an idiot.

And so, Sarah did what she did best and diffused the situation by putting on a charming smile and speaking politely.

It wasn't too big of a surprise to her that Billy was so hostile, though. She really couldn't blame him because she would be the same way if the roles were reversed. Perhaps she did overstep her boundaries, but it wasn't like she knew that it was *his* boundary she was stepping into. There was no way for her to know that Max was his stepsister.

The two were just unlucky it turned out that way.

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Sarah hated getting home late. It was something she actively tried not to do, but sometimes, it was inevitable that she trudged into her home when the sun had set long before.

"I'm home," she called out blankly, stuffing her hands in the pockets of her jacket, waiting.

From around the corner, she could already see the shadow of the only other person of the home making their way into the room Sarah resided in.

"Where were you?"

"The same place I always am," Sarah replied, bitingly, despite

knowing it wasn't the smartest thing for her to do. "It hasn't changed from every other time you've asked. I have to earn some type of money to survive, don't you know?"

Sarah's head whipped to the side harshly, causing her to grit her teeth as her cheek felt on fire. She narrowed her green eyes as she looked to meet identical ones.

"Watch your tone with me," the woman in front of her hissed. "What have I told you about getting home on time? You're lucky enough to have a home to come back to. What would your father say if he could see you?"

Sarah shoved past her mother, decidedly remaining silent at the rhetorical question, but answering, "I'm not sure about you but I wouldn't consider this a home since I don't even have an actual bed to sleep in, but whatever fits your fancy, *Mother*," Sarah drawled out hatefully, tossing her bag on her bundle of blankets on the floor.

A blow to the back and the sound of something shattering turned Sarah's attention back to her mother. Sarah winced at the feeling of glass shards in her skin as she caught sight of her mother's seething form, her visibly shaking in anger.

"You ungrateful piece of shit," the woman growled lowly, attentively keeping her voice down in case somebody heard. "If it wasn't for you, we wouldn't have to live in this shithole, so you have no right to disrespect the roof over your head."

Her mother stalked towards her, gripping Sarah's chin harshly, causing the skin to bruise. "Do you understand?"

Sarah remained silent and nodded, tears involuntarily filling her eyes in frustration. They remained in that position for a few more moments before her mother threw her face the other way, stalking back to her room. "Clean this up and get dinner going."

Sarah stared at her mother's back feeling her cheeks heat up in anger and embarrassment. Embarrassed because she allowed herself to be talked down to and degraded *again*, and she didn't do a thing about it. Grumbling irritably, she wiped the moisture from her eyes and

began to pick up the glass pieces from the bottle.

Once she was finished, Sarah went to their tiny kitchen and opened the refrigerator to find that dinner was once again going to be a small affair that consisted of enough food to feed, maybe, a small child. She sighed and got to work.

She was interrupted by a solid knock on the door, causing her to tense up in anticipation. The Aston family didn't receive visitors. Especially after dark.

"I'll get it!" her mother called out. Sarah peeked her head through the doorway to see exactly *who* would be visiting the small family only to drop her jaw in astonishment.

Billy Hargrove stood in her doorway, speaking to her mother with a flirty grin on his face, and she could've sworn she was going insane.

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**I want to give a super thanks to everybody who's reviewed, favorited, and followed! Thank you so much for reading this story!**

## 4. Chapter 4

Billy wasn't quite sure what prompted him to follow Sarah home. Maybe it was the reason behind her actions, or maybe it was her own strangeness that intrigued him in a way. He had never paid any attention to her before, and he honestly felt that he would've if he had seen a girl with a battered face like hers. It stuck out in a crowd easily.

But for some reason, she was never a blip on his radar. There was no eye contact between the two, no accidental run-ins, no awkward encounters. There was nothing between him and Sarah Aston, and maybe that was why he was interested.

Billy had his own suspicions about Sarah. About her intentions and her own secretiveness, and he only wanted to confirm them. Nothing else.

When he pulled into a run down home that definitely saw better days, Billy's suspiciousness escalated, and he got a feeling he wasn't going to like what he was about to encounter. He shoved down any trepidations and marched up to the paint-chipped door and knocked soundly, preparing himself for what he came for.

Despite all of his ideas running amok in his head, he still had to control his expression when a woman that wasn't Sarah answered the door.

The woman was presumably her mother based on the same green eyes and straight nose. She looked ragged with bloodshot eyes and greasy black hair compared to Sarah's well kept brown. She couldn't have been too old, but the way she took care of herself disagreed with that statement. The woman reeked of alcohol, and Billy almost wrinkled his nose in derision before smiling *that* grin at the woman, who had narrowed her eyes at him.

"Hi, Mrs. Aston," he greeted politely, leaning against the door, looking up at the woman through his eyelashes. "I apologize for stopping by so late, but is there any possible way I could speak with your daughter? It'll only be a moment."



Sarah's mother was visually flustered at his appearance and speech, and on the inside, he recoiled at the thought of gaining this woman's affections.

"O-of course!" she stuttered, cheeks tinted red. "What did you say your name was?"

"Billy Hargrove, ma'am," he answered with another smile, and she bit her lip.

*Just deal with it*, he thought disgustedly. *Just for a few more minutes.*

Sarah's mother turned away to get her daughter, and Billy dropped his polite facade to glance around the house from the doorway.

It wasn't a nice place to live, he could definitely tell from the small visual he had. He could see a few pictures with the family - Sarah, her mother, and two men, most likely her father and her brother she had mentioned. There wasn't too many, and there were a few frames that were face down. Some of the walls had a few holes, and Billy clenched his fist at the thought. He caught sight of Sarah's backpack sprawled out on a clump of blankets, and he sucked in a breath.

This was definitely not a home.

But, the thing that really ignited his blood? The look on Sarah's face as she turned the corner with her mother in tow.

He knew that face well. The defiant yet fearful look that you gave to someone who obviously held more power over you.

He knew it well because he had the same one.

Sarah turned to her mother. "We'll be right outside. It seems really important, but I'll make it quick to finish dinner."

If Billy didn't have his own experiences, he would've missed the flash in her mother's eyes at her daughter's words. But for the sake of appearances, Sarah's mother just plastered on a smile and said, "No rush! Please, take your time. He seemed to need your help."

Sarah just gave her a weak nod and motioned for Billy to step away

from the doorway so that she could join him. Once the door was closed, she whipped around the glare at him, crossing her arms.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed lowly, glancing behind at the door to ensure that her mother wouldn't hear.

Billy shoved his hands in his jacket pockets to hide his white fists and shrugged nonchalantly. "Shitty place you got here. Your mom's a real piece of work too."

She looked uncomfortable but maintained the fire in her eyes. "Did you seriously follow me home, Hargrove? *Why?*" she asked incredulously. Billy rolled his neck and breathed out of his nose.

He wasn't sure why he was so angry. He didn't know the girl very well - at all, really. She was just a random person that happened to know about his home life, but it wasn't like she was an important person to him. He wasn't worried about her opinion on him, so there had to be a reason why he felt so strongly, right?

"Maybe so that your mom wouldn't beat your ass again," he shot her words back at her, and he watched her reaction carefully. She looked like she took a physical blow, and her face was white, yet he continued, "I had my suspicions when you said that to me paired with the colors on your face, so I wanted to see if I was right," he shrugged again. "And I was. Let me ask, is this the first time you've been hit with a bottle?"

Sarah continued to stare at him with wide eyes, and he returned it evenly.

Billy wasn't a stranger to confrontation. In fact, he thrived in it. He liked dominating the other person and he found satisfaction when he came out on top. But, in this particular situation, he wasn't feeling satisfaction or pride when he had the upper hand in this situation. He only felt more anger.

"The day after you dropped Max off," he began, seeing that she wasn't going to be saying anything yet. "That's when you looked like a punching bag. Did you get in trouble because of that?"

Sarah flinched at his words, and he almost thought she was going to lie to him until she nodded, looking away from him with a scowl on her face.

"I came home late."

She knew that he didn't need any other explanation. He knew that he didn't need any other explanation. Billy pursed his lips.

"Let me talk to her."

Sarah shot her head to look at him again, her mouth agape. "O-oh, uh, no. You really don't need to."

Billy shook his head at her protests and gave her door a pointed look. "Either you open the door or I will."

Sarah continued to stare at him, eyes looking for something in his, and Billy adamantly stared back. She finally sighed and opened the door, calling out, "Uh, Mom? Billy wants to talk to you before he leaves. I'm not sure what."

Billy threw on his smile for the mother - if he could even call her that - and stepped inside, following behind Sarah. "Mrs. Aston, if I'm honest, I'm not doing too hot in school," he relayed, forcing an embarrassed flush on his face as he chuckled. "Sarah here is one of the best, and I came to ask for your permission that she could tutor me after school."

"Well..." Mrs. Aston seemed to contemplate, throwing a look to her daughter, who looked uncomfortable in the situation.

"I would *really* appreciate it," Billy implored, biting his own lip. "Surely, she got her smarts from you. You must've had lots of handsome men asking for your help, right?" he complimented, feeling the taste of bile in his mouth at her reaction to his charming words.

"You're not wrong about that, Billy," Mrs. Aston giggled, and Billy was sure he would vomit. "I couldn't allow my daughter to ignore a call for help, could I? What type of mother would I be?"

Even without looking straight at Sarah, Billy knew she was gearing

up to say something harsh, and despite the fact that he thought this woman deserved it, he wanted to prevent her from stirring her mother's temper. He sent her a quick look before smiling again.

"Of course, Sarah must've learned all about selflessness from you, am I right?" he flattered. "I was also curious... Would it be too much to ask if you would allow me to drive her? You seem like you're busy, and perhaps having access to a car might help."

"Oh, yes, yes!" Mrs. Aston assured, and Sarah glared at him. "She *does* hog the vehicle even when I ask politely!"

"Probably because I paid for it," he heard Sarah mutter, and luckily her mother didn't hear.

"She should be flattered that a handsome boy like you would ask for her presence! Grateful even!" Mrs. Aston exclaimed, placing a hand on Sarah's shoulder. Billy could see the tightening of it. "You should thank him, sweetheart."

Billy couldn't help the small smirk at the twisted lips of the teen.

"Thank you, Billy. I appreciate it."

"No, no," Billy said amused. "Thank *you*, Sarah. You're the one that's helping me."

Sarah glared daggers at him again, but even he could see the slight relief in her eyes at his intervention. He wasn't sure why it made him feel better.

"Well, I'll walk him out, Mom," Sarah cut in, and her mother nodded, not removing her eyes from Billy, raking up and down. Billy shuddered inwardly, and Sarah led him back outside, shutting the door behind him.

"Why did you do that?" she asked him, softer than before. Billy glanced at her and saw that she was looking ahead, keeping her eyes away from his. He frowned.

"Is it wrong for me to return the favor? And besides," he grinned wolfishly. "I really *do* need a tutor."

Sarah looked back up at him, a quirk on her lips, and Billy could truly see how tired she was, the bags under her eyes much more pronounced now that he was looking at them. His grin was replaced with a frown, and he grabbed her arm, gentler than the last time.

"Look, I know that this is weird, because *God* do I think this is weird, but we can help each other out, alright? My dick of a dad seems to like you and so does Max. And I know your mom *definitely* likes me."

Sarah glanced down at his hand before slowly nodding. "What a pair we are, huh," she huffed out, lips curling up slightly, and he gave a short laugh before nodding along.

"Yeah," he let out. "I'll be here to pick you up tomorrow. And I'm sure Max will have questions, so you can figure out how to deal with that shit."

He walked away from her and could faintly hear a, "Thanks, Billy."

He gave his own small smile before pulling out of the driveway and dealing with his own family.

## 5. Chapter 5

Was Sarah surprised when Billy pulled into her driveway? A little.

To her, Billy seemed unreliable most of the time. He failed to turn in his work at school, failed to pick up Max most of the time, and failed to really be trustworthy in any sense of the word.

However, she couldn't help the nagging feeling that *of course* he wouldn't lie and leave her. Whether it was from the revelation that they both shared similar home lives or she just had a feeling about him, Sarah couldn't say for sure.

Sarah heard the sound of a car pulling into her driveway and pulled her backpack onto her shoulders and marched outside. Her mother was still asleep, and she had no desire to wake her up. Sarah locked the door behind her and caught the eyes of Billy, who sent her a small smirk. He said a few words to Max, who was in the front seat, that caused her to frown and step out.

"Morning, Max," Sarah greeted casually, "What are you doing?"

"You get front seat," the young teen muttered, clambering into the backseat of the car. Sarah stifled a laugh at that and sat down, placing her backpack near her feet, turning to face Billy, who was already looking at her.

"You didn't have to make Max sit in the back," Sarah pointed out, seeing the redhead cross her arms from her peripheral. Billy rolled his eyes at her comment and pulled out of her driveway. "She can get over it."

The car was silent after that save for the low volume of music playing from the radio and Billy's tapping hands on the steering wheel. Sarah wouldn't say she was completely uncomfortable, but she definitely wasn't relaxed. It wasn't a scenario she had seen herself being a part of at any point of her life. If someone were to ask her how likely it would be that she was getting rides from Billy Hargrove to school, her answer would be the same likeliness of her mother saying 'I love you.'

"So," Max finally broke the silence. "Not that I have a problem with you or anything, but what exactly are you doing *here*, Sarah?"

Billy darted his eyes to Sarah, and she could see his own curiosity at what her answer would be. Sarah sent him a slight smirk and turned to better face the young girl in the back seat.

"Well if you must know, Billy here is shit at school, and he's decided to request my services."

Max huffed a giggle out as Billy shot Sarah a dark look at her choice of explanation. He glanced at Max through the rearview mirror and growled out, "Don't laugh at that bullshit. I'm not an idiot."

Sarah boldly patted his leg in mock pity. "Of course not."

Billy swiped her hand away and mumbled bitterly under his breath, and Sarah grinned at him, sending a wink to Max, who was attempting to stifle her chuckles.

Sarah liked riding with them.

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Sarah assumed that once the three of them arrived at school, they would each part ways and continue on their day until school was out. She wished Max a good day and to tell Dustin she said hello and to *not* show up at tutoring then started her trek into high school. What she wasn't expecting was for Billy to walk with her instead of strutting in his normal outlandish way.

"What are you doing?" she asked him, lowly. "I didn't know this was an invitation to be best friends."

Billy scoffed. "I'm walking into school, what the hell does it look like? And don't think too highly of yourself."

Sarah scowled and ignored the blatant stares they were receiving from the rest of the student body.

Sarah may not have cared about how she looked to everyone, but she certainly didn't enjoy overwhelming attention. Of course, she probably should've guessed that it would've happened eventually due

to her newfound affiliation with Billy. It didn't fail to make her uncomfortable, nonetheless.

"Don't you have other people who would just *love* to have you around?" she whispered harshly, going to her locker, Billy still following. "If this is a pity thing, I swear to-

Billy grabbed her wrist firmly to stop her tirade. When she met his eyes, she expected to see the typical anger or annoyance he constantly portrayed. However, as much as those two things were still there, a certain reassurance and softness meshed with them. It knocked the breath out of Sarah because that expression was something she was so unused to seeing, and she would be in denial if she said she didn't find it slightly endearing.

He shook her wrist to keep her attention. "It's *not* a pity thing. God, why would I of all people give pity out?" he laughed bitterly. "No, it's because maybe we could actually try and be friends or something? It'd be better than just yelling at each other when we're together, which I'll remind you, will be more often."

See, there was still one thing about Billy Hargrove that Sarah was unsure about, and that would be his sincerity.

Sarah didn't do well with it herself, if she were to be honest, but Billy was a wildcard. She had trouble knowing if he was feeling anything other than anger (there's no way he could be angry all the time, right?) and he wasn't particularly known for his love and compassion when it comes to any sort of relationship. She studied his face for any sign of deceit, and when she found none, she began to smile at him.

"And maybe a little bit of pity."

The smile immediately disappeared, and she whacked him with her backpack as hard she could. "Asshole!"

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"Did you not get Max's message?"

"I did and I made the easy decision to ignore it."

Dustin sat across from her, *as usual*, and Sarah was torn between



wanting to ruffle his hair or put her head through a wall.

"Should I just go ahead and accept this?" she lamented, and Dustin nodded wisely.

"That would be in your best interest. Max said that you got a ride with her and Billy this morning."

Sarah heard the question in his tone and the suspicious gleam in his eye. It was easy to assume that, due to his close friendship with Max, he disliked Billy quite a lot. She waved off his thoughts. "I'm tutoring Hargrove. Almost like I should be tutoring other kids instead of you."

Dustin ignored her latter words and leaned forward, mouth agape. "You're *tutoring* Billy?!" he shook his head at her. "No, nope. I won't allow it. I have the reserved position of wasting your time."

Sarah shot him a reprimanding look and cuffed him on the head roughly. "This isn't a decision you get to make. And I'm glad you finally realized your sole purpose in life is to waste all of my time."

He looked prepared to say some snarky comment that would surely leave her wanting to strangle him, but something over her shoulder caught his attention. He appeared to be disgruntled for a second, and Sarah whipped around to see what was so interesting, catching sight of five heads darting to hide from her stare. She stifled a laugh.

"Are your friends spying on us?" she snorted. "And here I thought I was your dirty little secret."

Sarah wagged her finger at the boy, and Dustin scowled, slapping her finger from his face. "Do you know how many excuses I come up with to hang out with you over them? I can only say 'I ate something bad' so many times."

With that, Sarah slapped her forehead in exasperation. "You idiot," she sighed. "Why don't you, I don't know, *invite them* or something? I can't get rid of you, no matter how hard I want to, so might as well gather the whole crew."

Dustin grumbled and made eye contact with the other kids over her shoulder, jerking his head in their direction. Sarah smiled at the

group that approached the two of them, recognizing one to be Max.

"Hello," she greeted politely. "I'm Sarah, Dustin's victim."

"You can't be a victim if I'm not actually causing you harm."

"No, but I definitely want to cause *you* harm, sometimes."

The other young teens shifted their attention between the two of them as they began to banter, and Sarah would've reached over and yanked on Dustin's hair if she hadn't remembered their audience. She cleared her throat. "Sorry. Dustin's told me a lot about all of you. Nice to see you, Max."

The redhead smiled at her, and the others introduced themselves.

"Wait, so you're Nancy Wheeler's brother, and you're Jonathon Byers?" Sarah cut in, pointing at Mike and Will. The two nodded, and Sarah barked out a laugh.

"I almost feel obligated to be friends with them. I mean, I already talk to Max's stepbrother, so it seems right that we make our own gang of older siblings, huh?" Sarah turned to Lucas and El. "You two don't have any older brothers or sisters that would coincidentally be my age?"

The two shook their head and Lucas shot back, "You can take my little sister, though. Save me a lot of headaches."

Frantically, Sarah waved her hands at him in denial. "Please no. I already have Dustin to deal with on a daily basis and he's a sister and brother mixed in one."

"I resent that statement."

Ignoring him, Sarah checked her watch and gathered her things. "It's time for me to head out. It was nice meeting all of you, and I'm more than sure we'll all be seeing each other again."

Sarah waved goodbye to them, only vaguely hearing a, "Dude, I can't believe you've been hanging out with *her* everyday and not let us in!"

## 6. Chapter 6

As time passed, Sarah would go on a limb and say that her and Billy were...friends? More than acquaintances? Not necessarily just study partners? Something in that range. It wasn't a position that she would've ever thought she'd be in, but honestly, she couldn't say she disliked it.

Since Billy's intervention, her mother had really laid off. Not completely, of course not, but it wasn't the same as before. She could only assume that it was the same for Billy, but she preferred not to ask him because it was a sore topic, and he had a habit of shunning her whenever she brought up a sore topic.

"Sarah, I have a question."

Her and Billy were sitting at his house while his father and stepmom were gone. Max was with her group of friends and didn't need to be picked up for another few hours, giving the two of them time to relax and talk (argue, more like it). They were in his room, Billy on his bed because she 'wasn't allowed to ruin his stuff,' and her leaning against the side.

"What is it?" she glanced up from her book. Billy had a contemplative look on his face, almost like he was debating whether or not he should ask.

"What happened to your dad?" he finally let out. "I saw the pictures but you never talk about him."

Sarah sighed and shut her book, leaning further against his bed. He sat beside her.

"To be honest?" she asked rhetorically. "Not really sure. The quick version of it is that my older brother died, my mom went nuts, then my dad left with only a wave and the family vehicle, and I got stuck with the short straw."

Billy was silent, staring in front of him, his jaw working and his eyes narrowed like usual.

"Can I ask what brought this up? It can't just be that because you haven't brought it up in the weeks we've known each other," Sarah pointed out, turning her body to face him fully. "I'm not upset or anything - just curious."

She watched patiently as he sorted his thoughts. She couldn't remember when she realized she was able to read his expressions so well.

"It just pisses me off," Billy finally admitted, clenching his fists on his thighs. Sarah placed her hand on his to unravel it, and he finally looked at her, fire in his eyes. "It pisses me off that he let his kid get her shit knocked around."

Sarah blinked at him. "That's what you're mad about? You don't need to be, Billy."

"Well you're not!" he yelled at her, nostrils flaring. "You're not even a little mad that this man who was supposed to be your father left you with that woman?"

Sarah studied him. Billy was known to be volatile and have outbursts pertaining to certain subjects, and she was on the receiving end of some of the rants he had. They were usually angry and impulsive and he had no qualms with insulting her, but this one was a different type of anger - one that wasn't directed towards her.

"It's not that I'm not mad," Sarah explained slowly, gripping his hand tighter in hopes of calming him down. "It's that Jeremiah Aston isn't coming back anytime soon."

Some of the fight had left him, and she could feel his hand relax in hers finally. She pat his leg with her free one and started to snicker. "I would've never thought you cared that much. My heart can't take it."

"Shut up," he bit back without any heat. He leaned his head back and stared at the ceiling, tightening his grip on her hand. "It's not fair."

Sarah sagged against him and let out a defeated sigh. "You're right."

The two sat in silence, a comfortable one, and Sarah realized something important.

Billy was her best friend. Well, he was her only friend that wasn't in middle school.

---

"You seem happier."

Sarah glanced up from her position on the couch. "How so?"

Dustin looked at her suspiciously as he approached her, leaning in. "It's hard to explain, but it's definitely there. What happened?"

Sarah was looking after Dustin for the weekend while his mother was away. 'Looking after' was a loose term, but he was home for the moment preparing to run off with his friends soon.

"I got a good grade on my English test? Not really sure what you're looking for, kiddo."

Dustin continued to study her, and it was starting to make her uncomfortable. She shifted in her seat and crossed her arms defensively. "Was I not happy before? I don't get why this is a thing right now."

He shook his head at her. "It's not that you weren't *happy*, per se, but you weren't like this. You don't even look the same."

*Oh, she thought dumbly. He noticed that I wasn't black and blue as much anymore.*

Sarah thought Dustin was a good kid. An annoying one, but a good one, nonetheless. She wasn't sure why he never outright asked her about what was going on with her because she was almost positive he would do it to anyone else no matter who they were. He was an inquisitive boy that didn't have a very strong filter from his brain to his mouth, so it would only make sense for him to raise questions.

But he never did.

She knew that it wasn't like he didn't notice it. Hell, *everyone* noticed it. It wasn't a big secret that her family had their issues from finance all the way to familial ties. Dustin was a breath of fresh air. Maybe it was because of his own insecurity with his teeth.

"Well, I've been working on that," she answered, shoving his face away from hers. "I spend a lot of my time doing more productive things now." *I don't stay there as long anymore.*

He nodded at her. "Keep doing whatever you're doing. I think you're doing good." *Stay away from there. I don't like how you look when you come back.*

Sarah grinned at him fondly. "Whatever you want, kid. Are you about to go to the Wheeler's?"

He nodded. "Yep, but then we're going to the arcade. We're all just meeting there so Mrs. Wheeler can cook for us."

Sarah dug through her pocket and pulled out the change resting in it. "Go nuts."

The boy grinned happily and wrapped his arms around her. "You do a great job of making me happy, you know that?"

"Yeah, yeah. Don't stay out too late."

Dustin ran out the door and waved her a goodbye, and Sarah sagged against his couch. "What a pain."

---

A knock on the door was what woke Sarah up. She blinked a few times to gather her bearings and shuffled to answer the door.

"Uh, Sarah, right?"

Sarah looked him up and down. "Yes? You're Steve, aren't you? What're you doing at Dustin's?"

The boy in front of her shuffled his feet and looked around her. "He told me to come by. I'm guessing he isn't here."

"You'd be correct."

The two stared at each other in silence, and Sarah tapped her fingers on the doorway awkwardly. "Do - Do you know why? He's been gone for awhile now."

Steve just shrugged and ran his hand through his hair. "No... Hey, aren't you friends with Hargrove?"

Sarah crossed her arms and narrowed her eyes at him.

Was she aware of the rivalry between the two boys? Of course. She knew that Billy disliked Steve Harrington and Steve disliked Billy Hargrove. They had gotten into fist fights, and Billy wanted the position of being 'top dog' at Hawkins. Sarah didn't have anything against Steve, she really didn't, but she was better acquainted (could she say friends by this point? It felt nicer) with Billy. And well, she liked Billy whereas she was indifferent to Steve.

"What of it?" she challenged. Steve gave her a concerned stare that Sarah did not like one bit.

"You know what he's like right? You should be careful - he's not the friendly type," he warned her, and Sarah was half-tempted to pull a Billy and sock him in the face a few times.

"I'm sorry?" she settled on, glaring at him so fiercely that he took a step back. "This is the first time we've ever spoken and you really have the audacity to *warn* me of my choices? Wow, you're an asshole, you know that?"

Steve spluttered, "W-What? I'm just trying to help you!"

Scoffing, Sarah began to close the door in the face. "You don't even know me! Dustin isn't here so you can leave now. Nice speaking with you."

Sarah slammed the door in his face, not bothering to listen to any other bullshit that came out of his mouth. She huffed in frustration. How dare he! Sarah knew exactly what she was getting into - sort of, there's still a lot of things that surprise her about Billy - and she definitely didn't need someone like *Steve Harrington* to tell her how to live her life.

Sarah brooded in silence for a few more moments until she heard the sound of the door opening. Sending a glance back, she could see the curly hair of her ward, and she frowned at him. He stared back

innocently.

"Did Steve come by? I forgot that I was leaving."

"Dustin," she began slowly. "I'm not going to be friends with Steve, so don't try and do that again."

"Damn."



## 7. Chapter 7

Billy didn't do relationships.

He didn't do the whole handholding, cuddling, and 'I love you' thing. He preferred a casual fling - a fun time then never bothering with it again. He had never had a serious relationship even in California, and it never bothered him before.

At least until he started to hang out with Sarah.

He didn't know when it happened - he didn't *want* to know when it happened - but all of sudden he realized that he actually, dare he say it, *enjoyed* the girl's presence. He liked being around her. He would never admit it, especially not to her, but he looked forward to their hangouts.

Sarah wasn't the normal type of girl that Billy would imagine himself sticking around with. She was too skinny from the treatment from home, a natural frown on her face, taller than the typical seventeen-year-old girl, and so much baggage he could go on a long trip and still be well-off.

Maybe it was the fact that they both saw each other in a setting that no one else could see. It wasn't because she was in a similar situation (that'd be pretty fucked up, even for him) and it had nothing to do with her not wanting anything to do with him from the beginning either.

He'd like to say it was because she was a fighter, like him. She was angry and made sure that her mother knew. That he knew. There was no filter during their conversations, and it usually consisted of her ranting on and on about all sorts of things from home to school to the weather and all the way to the government. It was hard to look away when she had the fire in her eyes and her cheeks flushing because of her anger.

Really, it was just hard to look away.

He had a good idea what it meant. A *really* good idea. It was a feeling

that he wasn't sure if he was comfortable with or not, but it was something he definitely liked.

"Your house really is a piece of shit," he droned, hands in his jeans pockets as they walked up to her house. Sarah rolled her eyes at him and snarked back, "Sorry that I'm practically an orphan, Billy. What can you do?"

He rolled his eyes at her dramatics, a half-smile tugging at his lips. He jerked his head towards the house. "Is your mom not here? The car's out front."

Sarah just shrugged, tugging her flannel sleeves down. "Not sure. Sometimes she's gone anyway. Don't know where and don't care."

Billy pursed his lips at the thought of Sarah being left alone - even though he knew that she was anyway - and followed her inside. It looked cleaner than usual, and he smirked down at the girl. "Did you clean up since you knew I was coming?"

He could see the faint pink on her cheeks and his grin widened as she shook her head at him, exasperated. "No. I didn't clean up today, actually."

There was a suspicious undertone, and Billy shared her sentiment. Since he's known Sarah and her mother, he had come to a quick realization that everything was put onto the shoulders of the teenager. Her mother managed to pay for the bills (he still has no idea how) but everything else rested on Sarah to do. Seeing the house in better shape without Sarah's time spent was a shock.

"I'm home?" Sarah called out questioningly, taking Billy's stuff and throwing it with hers in the corner. A head peeked around the corner, and Billy grimaced at the sight of her mother. He could see the quick change of emotion from disgust to excitement when her eyes fell upon him.

"Welcome home! I see you've brought Billy with you," she suggested, embracing him as if he were a family friend (could he even be considered that?), and it took every bit of self control he had not to recoil at her touch.

"Nice to see you too, Mrs. Aston," he responded, and she hit him lightly on the chest. "Please, I've told you to call me Mary!"

*I'd rather burn in hell.*

Nonetheless, he just smiled politely, seeing Sarah's eyes rolling from over her mother's shoulder, and he cocked a smirk at her. Sarah coughed to get her mother's attention. "Billy and I are going to work on some chemistry. Is the kitchen okay?"

Mary pursed her lips at her daughter before shaking her head. "Actually, I brought someone home with me today. It's *great*," she gushed, and Billy watched as Sarah took a few steps back at the notion. "I'll go get him!"

Mary rushed out of the room to get the mystery stranger, and Billy grabbed Sarah's wrist. "What's wrong?"

He watched her face scrunch up before looking back at him. She patted his hand. "I just never like it when she brings people home, that's all. Sorry you had to be here when she was."

*You're here when she is. That's what I don't like.*

Instead of responding, Billy shuffled closer, standing shoulder to shoulder with the girl. He had no idea who her mother brought home - he particularly didn't care - but he could feel the uncomfortable vibes radiating from Sarah, and only *he* wanted to be the one to make her uncomfortable.

The two waited patiently, Sarah fidgeting at the idea of a stranger (*a man*, Billy thought angrily. *A man that makes her uncomfortable.*) and Billy felt his temper rising.

After what felt like an hour, Mary Aston emerged with a bright smile on her face - a genuine one that had Billy feeling strange. With it, he could see Sarah in it, and he didn't like it. Before he could think about it too much, a man followed behind her.

He was tall with well kept brown hair that was speckled with gray in it. His eyes were a light brown, his jaw was strong, teeth straight, and his clothing indicated that he was well-off financially. His skin was

healthy, a drastic contrast to the woman next him, and he had facial hair that complimented his appearance.

He knew this man. And by the sound of Sarah's gasp, she did as well.

The man smiled. "Hi, Sarah. It's been awhile?" he said sheepishly, running a hand through his hair. Sarah shifted closer to Billy as Mary grabbed on the man's arm. "Your father is back! Isn't this fantastic?"

"Fantastic?" Sarah said lowly, gripping Billy's arm tightly to the point that he could feel the pressure underneath his jacket. "He's been gone for five years and you think this is *fantastic*?"

Jeremiah Aston had the audacity to look guilty. "I understand it's been a long time, honey, but I had some things to sort through -"

Sarah ripped herself from Billy's side, face bright red and seethed, "Things to sort through? Are you *kidding* me?!" she thrust a finger at her mother, who looked enraged at her attitude. "You left me with - with *her* and now you want to come back and think everything will be fine. Have you *seen* this place? I'm a human punching bag, this house is a few storms away from becoming a real pile of shit, and my mother is an abusive alcoholic, but you have 'things to sort through?'"

She was panting at the end of her tirade, and Mary stepped forward, fury in her eyes. "How *dare* you speak to your father like that?"

He caught the sight of the hand, and Billy immediately pulled Sarah away from her parents. Jeremiah frowned and attempted to calm the two women down. "Look, I'm not expecting a warm welcome, but you need to understand it from my point of view."

This time, Billy couldn't hold his out derisive snort. "Your point of view? Can you even have one when you left your kid like that?"

Sarah's father rounded on him. "I'm sorry, who are you?"

Billy shoved Sarah behind him and clenched his fist, stalking towards the man. "The guy who's going to kick your fucking ass."

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"You didn't need to do that."

Billy hissed at the burning sensation the alcohol on his knuckles gave. "I'd do it again."

He watched as Sarah's dainty hands held his injured one carefully, cleaning the wound and wrapping it in gauze. Her head was down, and he didn't have to see her face to know that she was close to crying. He placed his other hand on hers. "Hey, look at me."

Slowly, she lifted her face to meet his, and he could see the tears welling in her eyes and her nose begin to turn red. A flare of anger surged through him as they sat right outside from where the two people that made her like this were. He breathed through his nose harshly and shut his eyes for a moment before giving her a soft look.

"It's okay to be mad. To be sad or - or even be happy if that's what you want," he started, blurting out any comforting words he could think of. "Your mom is a bitch and your dad a raging prick, and you have every right to be angry, Sarah."

He squeezed her hands and pulled her in for an embrace, heart beating faster at their proximity. "And you can always just stay at my place. I can sneak you in, and you're right - for some goddamn reason, my dad loves you."

A watery chuckle escaped her lips as she tightened her arms around him, resting her head on his shoulder. "Thanks, Billy."

She pulled away from him and smiled a smile that took his breath away every time. He gave her a small one back. *I'll kill that son of a bitch if he makes her cry again.*

"Billy?"

Sarah was giving him a contemplative look. He stared at her questioningly before she nodded to herself, gripping his face tightly and pushing her lips onto his.

His eyes widened at the suddenness of it before returning it with equal fervor, pulling her closer. He had imagined what it would feel like, to kiss her, and he was pleasantly surprised when it was much better than he imagined. He could taste the saltiness from her tears

and he could feel how his lips were going to swell, but nevertheless, he couldn't help but smile.

They pulled apart both panting for breath, cheeks flushed, eyes glazed.

"Wow," she finally breathed out, hands still on his face. Billy grinned at her. "Wow is right."

## 8. Chapter 8

"I haven't seen you in a few days."

"My dickbag dad had me doing stuff."

"Oh? Like getting *these*?"

Sarah scowled as Billy flicked the rims of her new glasses. There was a smirk on his face and a twinkle in his eye that hadn't been there before, only showing itself after the two had kissed.

They hadn't talked about it - Sarah wasn't sure if she *wanted* to talk about it since he was so keen on avoiding the topic. It didn't stop him from wrapping an arm around her and tucking her into him in an obvious display of masculinity that only came from boys that didn't want to share their possessions (Sarah herself wasn't too keen on the idea of becoming a *possession*). But, it was strange that he wouldn't *speak* of it because this was *Billy*. He said whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. And she would think he wanted to talk of it.

She swiped his hand away from her face and furrowed her brows. "I've needed glasses since I was a kid. My shitty mom didn't take me back after my dad left."

"You drove without being able to see?" Billy sounded skeptical as he leaned against the Camaro beside her, a hand lazily holding his head up as his other went forward to grab at her glasses again. His lips started to curl up. "Do you have a death wish?"

Sarah hit his hand away again, cheeks heating up at his attentions. "No," she replied hotly, shouldering her backpack in hopes of looking more dignified than she was. "I had places to be. I'm not blind," she insisted.

"I thought you squinted all the time because you were just angry."

"I didn't squint!"

"You definitely squinted."

She reached forward to shove him away, only for him to grab her wrist and tug her flush against his chest. Her cheeks reddened as he grinned down at her, and Sarah vaguely took into account the eyes on them from their peers as the two stood in the parking lot before school started.

It was tempting for her to ask him what he wanted. What he wanted from her, from this strange back and forth they had going (she wasn't going to lie and say she particularly *disliked* it). His father had assumed they were dating from the early stages of their friendship and from what Billy said, had welcomed it in a weird way. The hostility wasn't as palpable when she was over, Max seemed a little more livelier, and Billy didn't have as many new marks. It didn't change Neil into a great man, but it seemed he was more bearable.

Her mother was similar, especially now that her father was back in the picture. Mary was focused on keeping Jeremiah happy, and one of those things turned out to be not using their daughter as a punching bag as much. It didn't quell her anger for something Sarah didn't do, but it stopped her from having so many black eyes and split lips, something that both Billy and her annoying student noticed.

Perhaps it was unhealthy for the two of them to inadvertently use each other in hopes of deterring their abusive parents from smacking them around more than they already did, but it happened, and Sarah thought of it as an added bonus. Billy and her were friends - a little closer than most friends were - and she'd like to think that there was more out of the relationship than just a small reprieve of the hurt they endured.

The warning bell rang, and Sarah pulled herself away, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose in an effort to keep her composure. She jerked her head towards the school. "Come on. If I'm late to history again, I'm begging for a lecture to happen."

She turned on her heel, fully expecting Billy to whine and moan about having to go to class like he usually does, only to surprise her by grabbing her hand tightly and pulling her towards class. His legs were much longer than hers, and for some reason, he decided today would be the day he wanted to crack down and get to class on time.



He must've felt her questioning stare because he glanced back at her with a wicked gleam in his eye and that ever present smirk on his face.

"The quicker you get to class, the quicker you get out. Quicker you get out, quicker we have time between to do whatever the hell I want."

Sarah did *not* miss the implications behind his words.

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If Max noticed anything weird going on between the two teens, she didn't let on. It's not that Sarah wanted her *approval*, per se, but it was still on her mind that her closest friend's stepsister may not like it. Dustin didn't like the idea of her and Billy, going on about some past things that happened a few months before. He spoke so fast, and Sarah was only able to catch the part about Billy beating up Steve Harrington (something that seems to happen a lot to Steve) and that he'd beat her up too if he really wanted.

It took much convincing - begging - for him to leave her alone about it, and if he didn't, then she really would force him to leave her tutoring sessions for good and would only see him whenever his mom needed Sarah to watch him. It shut him up pretty quickly.

Max, however, was different. There was no love lost between the two siblings. Although, Billy did confide in her that he was working on it in his own roundabout way which could've meant anything. While it didn't mean he would care if Max suddenly disliked her, Sarah still had this stupid need for approval since she never got it at home.

The three were in the Camaro, a familiar scene now to their peers, and Sarah could just *feel* the little redhead's eyes on her. It was a scrutinizing stare that could only come from an angsty teenager, and it was a stare that would eventually catch the attentions of their driver if she kept it up. And if Sarah were honest, she was sure that he wouldn't want his little stepsister to have anything to say.

Billy had never come off as an affectionate person. He was rugged, apathetic, and too good for those type of things. He was vain and knew what type of attention he garnered just from the way he looked

and knew how much *more* attention he got just from the way he acted. She was sure he had never been in a real relationship (neither had she) and that he was in it for the physicality and for the ego boost.

So Sarah couldn't truly blame Max for staring at her when her brother's hand was clasped tightly around hers and keeping it on his jean clad thigh and the music blaring like it normally did. She couldn't blame her because she was staring at him as well, absolutely bewildered at his actions for the day.

She couldn't lie and say she was upset with the newfound attention, but it was so out of character that it was more shocking than exciting. Well, it was a *little* exciting.

Billy was a whirlwind on a normal day. He surprised her with the ease of switching from his public persona to the one she was privy to know so intimately. Somedays he brooded and couldn't even force himself to give her mother one of his charming smiles, and somedays he made it a point to flirt with her mother not only to see Sarah squirm, but to have Jeremiah send him a scathing glare from the same room.

He disliked Max - Sarah hoped he didn't truly *hate* her - yet there were days where he expressed his own concerns for her in his own weird way that never failed to confuse her. He asked her for advice ("*My brother liked pinching me when I was annoying so I'm not sure how much I help I could be.*") and subtly tried to convince her to talk to his stepsister who he might be starting to see as his *sister* instead of the kid that happened to live with him. Despite this, he never failed to say something nasty to the younger teen, and Sarah always wondered how much scolding she was allowed to give him before she overstepped.

Billy wasn't a great guy - he might not even be considered a good one to the general public and his family. To Sarah, though, he was her closest friend that had trouble expressing how he really felt due to his upbringing and own masculinity and had a newfound hobby of embarrassing her at any given moment.

Like now.

As if he knew where her thoughts had strayed, Billy glanced at her from the corner of his eye, smirked, and held her hand higher up on his thigh, tapping his other hand on the steering wheel to the music. Sarah gave Max a helpless look, and the redhead looked torn between disgust and amusement. If Sarah wasn't as confused as she was, she'd probably return it.

Today must've been a day where they decided to stay at Billy's because he didn't just drop Max off like he would if they were going to Sarah's. He turned the car off and got out of the vehicle, grabbing Sarah's backpack from her lap and waited for the two girls to get out. Sarah shared another look with Max before joining Billy.

"I didn't know I was going to be over here today," she told him as she pushed Max to go ahead of them. "I thought you'd just drop me off at my place."

Billy shrugged, put his hand on the small of her back and led her to his room like every other day she was over. Except, this was the first time she was intently aware of the heat from his hand through her clothing and the feel of his body behind her in a way that made her tense in anticipation.

"Like I said, I hadn't seen you in a few days," he replied simply, throwing her bag on the chair and shutting his door. "It's not like I'm just going to *call* you and ask your mom about you."

"Sorry, I know I didn't really tell you what was going on. It's been stupid crazy since my dad came back."

Billy's face soured at the reminder of Jeremiah Aston, and Sarah watched him carefully, cataloging the way his brows furrowed and the way his lips pursed. He had a naturally intense look that she enjoyed looking at, and despite what he liked to think, he was expressive in a way that surprised Sarah at first. Eventually, she thought it was a nice contrast to the cool and collected facade he gave everyone else.

He was an angry person, and as close as Sarah was to him, she would never be able to understand it. She could guess where it stemmed from, but it wouldn't be the same as him confiding in her about it.

Instead of getting upset, Sarah thought it was a fair trade - she never told him about her own pent up feelings from her own family.

It was nice, she thought, that he would get angry *for* her though.

Sarah took a seat on his bed with a sigh. Taking off her glasses, she rubbed the space between her brows. "It's weird having the both of them there so much. Summer's coming up too so it's going to be even weirder since I'll be home more often."

"Just come over here. I'll hide you away. Or I can just hit your dad again."

Her heart swelled at his words even if they were a little crude. She spared him a smile and fell backwards onto his bed with a groan.

"It's just stupid," she explained with a frown. "I still don't know why he came back after so long and so close to the end of the school year. I don't think he knows I'm graduating. Actually, I'm pretty sure he still thinks I'm that fourteen year old he left behind."

She heard rather than saw Billy take his jacket off and slip off his shoes. He nudged her legs in order for her to do the same ("*If you get your nasty ass shoes on my bed I'll kill you.*") and collapsed next to her, the scent of his cologne and sweat engulfing her. It wasn't unusual for them to lay next to each other, but it *was* new after the recent events of their first kiss and the little escapade they had between classes that day. And it just confused her even more.

Abruptly, Sarah turned on her side to face him, heart beating quickly at the sight of his blue eyes staring at her so intensely. Trying to ignore the heat on her cheeks, she frowned down at him.

"You're squinting again." He blurted out before she could get a word out, and Sarah threw a fist into his shoulder.

"I am not! I'm just thinking!" she argued with him, too aware of the fact that she *was* indeed squinting since she took her glasses off. "And you knew I was going to say something!"

A flash of his teeth told her that she was right before he sobered up.

"I'm no good with words, Sarah," he cut her off again before she could say anything. His eyes were staring up at the ceiling and one hand was behind his head while his other was playing with her hair. There was a seriousness to his face that could've been mistaken as irritation by anyone else, and Sarah wisely stayed silent.

"I'm not going to sit here and give you some pansy ass speech about why I wanna be with you, and I'm more of an 'actions speak louder than words' type of guy." He glanced at her with a certain softness in his eyes that she had only seen on a few occasions. "I don't do this with anyone else."

He sat up and pulled her with him. "I don't *want* to do this with anyone else." He leaned forward and kissed her softly, a hand coming to rest on the side of her neck and his thumb rubbing her jaw. When he pulled away, Sarah blinked a few times before laughing at him, eliciting a frown on his handsome face.

"Idiot," she chuckled, putting her own hands on his cheeks. "You said some pansy ass shit anyway. Now that we have that out of the way, what are you doing this summer? Still planning on working at the pool?"